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The Political Reality in Tukadoji's *Gramgeeta* in the Indian Context of Self Governance and Secularism

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Abstract: *Gramgeeta* has affinity with tradition which has historical sense and encompasses social, economical political, ethical, scientific, environmental, realities; enriches it with anecdotes, mythical allusions, references and cultural texture. The vision in *Gramgeeta*, irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion is cosmic, which converges on life on the earth and transcends towards cosmic. The vision which is projected in *Gramgeeta* is utopian vision for welfare of society. *Gramgeeta* attempts to create better world envisaging evils in the existing society. By creating utopian world he comments on real world and views that equality, unity, secular approach, self-reliance of villages, democratic approach are important. *Gramgeeta* has the pulse of democracy and emphasis upon the ideal system in the village. He conceptualizes village state as welfare state which is self-reliant, and trusts in secular approach. Religious tolerance is the essence of Indian secularism. Secularism in India arose in the context of communalism, and not of religion. Secularism in India is not anti-religion stance. Gramsabha, panchayat attribute democratic, republic spirit to village administration. It is an approach to the existing multicultural reality. It ensures a peaceful existence of all people, professing diverse religious faiths. He visualizes utopian society with self-governance and secular spirit as the cardinal components.

Keywords – Village state, Utopia, Secularism, Multicultural reality

Tukadoji's *Gramgeeta*, which is in verse form, comprises of 4674 *owi* /couplets and 9348 lines. It is in the form of discourse between a speaker and audiences, reveals colloquial tone. *Gramgeeta* has affinity with tradition which has historical sense and encompasses social, economical political, ethical, scientific, environmental, realities; enriches it with anecdotes, mythical allusions, references and cultural texture. Besides the depiction of consensus reality he dissatisfies with the present and creates his vision of reality to stress what he has to communicate. His pragmatic vision is experimental, progressive and valuable. He deconstructs traditional content and brings peripheral, marginal, subaltern to the center of the text. The vision in *Gramgeeta*, irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion is cosmic, which converges on life on the earth and transcends towards cosmic. The vision projected in *Gramgeeta* is utopian vision for welfare of society. Utopia is fantasy of welfare society and on contrary, dystopia is fantasy of subvert value, dark world.

Utopia is not an escape from consensus reality but the projection of consensus reality to create better world which unfolds a writer's vision of reality. The Utopian writer looks at society first and tries to see what, for the welfare purpose its significant elements are. The Utopia itself shows what society will be like if those elements will be fully developed. Tukadoji observes consensus reality and being dissatisfied with it projects it in *Gramgeeta* in magnified form to create the utopian world of social, economical, political, ethical, educational, hygienic welfare and development in science and technology. *Gramgeeta* attempts to create the better world envisaging evils in the existing society.

By creating utopian world he comments on real world. He views that equality, unity, secular approach, self reliance of villages, democratic approach are important. The ensuing analysis and interpretation explore the nature of political reality in Tukadoji's *Gramgeeta* in the Indian context of self-governance and secularism. The system of the self governing village community was the basic feature of ancient Indian policy. But the village was not merely a primary unit of political administration. It was free and syncretical communal order in which the community found fulfillment of its economic and social needs as well as its religious and cultural urges. An ancient Indian village has been described as a little republic and village was autonomous and self-sufficient governed by its own elected officers, satisfying its own needs. It provided management for its own education, police, tribunals, all economic necessities and functions.

The institution through which the village expressed its self-governing and autonomous characters was the *grainsabha*. It was an assembly of elders and heads of families representing the entire population of the village. It was supreme administrative and judicial authority in the village.

The head of the assembly was called '*gramini*'. He was generally chosen by the people themselves but was sometimes nominated by the king. He was helped by a council of two, three or five persons or by committee elected for different purposes. '*Gramini*' and his council were ultimately responsible to the people who regularly met in the assembly hall to administer their affairs.

Gramsabha and Grampanchayat

Gramgeeta has the pulse of democracy and emphasis upon the ideal system in the village.

Ideal system to be of village, so narrated *Gramgeeta*

Expanded from village to become cosmic

||49||¹

(Canto XXXVIII, 'Village Family')

'Rural family' is the name attributed to *gramshabha* in *Gramgeeta*. *Gramshabha* functions through *grampanchayat*. *Gramsabha* or village assembly is formed for village upliftment and it formulates laws. It is also termed as rural self-government. Every village has its own right to solve problems pertaining to village. Village assembly has power to formulate rules and plan for welfare of village. Village assembly is supreme body in village. Mahatma Gandhi contended:

My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic,
independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet
independent for many others in which dependence is
necessary?²

To him, '*Swaraj*' means self-rule, self-restrain, and self-government, depends entirely on our internal strength. In Constitution of India, in Article 40, it is explicitly stated, "The state shall take steps to organize village *panchayats*, and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them as unit of self-government."³ Constitution of India has empowered village assembly as Supreme Governing Body in the territory of a village.

In *grampanchayat* members are elected among villagers. If elected members don't function properly, *Gramsabha* has power to change them. Government may direct to dissolve *gramsabha* but can't dissolve, being self-reliant. Some opine that *grampanchayat* is body of government officers and *gramsabha* is governing it. *Grampanchayat* implements decision taken by *gramsabha*. In state, state assembly operates and in village, village assembly operates. Village being state whatever lies within limit of village is owned by village. It is jurisdiction of it.

Village rules village state; no over indulgence of anyone

In village we will live by all means

||83||

(Canto XIX, 'Life Education')

Village governs village state and village is to be self-reliant. Forest, pasture lake, land, lie in the jurisdiction of village. Villages' attention is directed to make village self-reliant, and an impetus is given to village industries. Villagers have to train to make footwears, leather from dead animals; to obtain phosphorous from bones, to prepare manure from urine, waste; to cultivate plants in farm. By becoming self-reliant with respect to food, clothes and shelter, village can be self-governed.

All to work for all; in the welfare of all our welfare

Great one to reveal lesson practising with determination

||123||

In it greatness; village life will be self-reliant.

This only real sign of ideal rural state

||124||

Village state, *Ramrajya*; self-reliance, this self - rule

Spoke universally honoured great ones; progress fine this

||125||

Our village, one state; mother home of all indispensable

Whenever such ideals are, our relations there

||126||

(Canto XXXIX, 'Earth Paradise')

He conceptualizes village state as welfare state which is self-reliant, and trusts in secular approach.

Secular Spirit

Secularism has been, and continues to be a central issues in our political and public life. Before Indian Independence, religion very nearly wrecked the nationalist movement and eventually destroyed the nationalist goal of the united India. While the pre-Independence developments centred on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity, the post-independence secular concept has evolved in a broader perspective.

There was originally no specific or explicit mention in the Constitution which declared that India was a secular state. The forty-second constitution Amendment Act, 1976 inserted in the preamble the word 'secular', though even the earlier provisions regarding religion were implicitly pointing towards a secular state. During the last two decades we are witnessing an increasing shift to religion in the sphere of Indian politics. At the heart of the problem lies the issue of how to keep state politics aloof from religion. Secular approach to Indian Society is mirrored in his verses :

- a) No party, no sect; no discrimination, opposition any
Our village will live with joy as family ||3||
(Canto XXXIX, 'Earth Paradise')
- b) Let there be brotherhood always in India
Render us blessings
- c) Come people of any sect, any religion
Open to all our temple is

The concept of secularism is essentially Western. It is a product of struggle between the state and the church. It was propounded by the church as an assertion of its independence in its religious affairs from the control and regulation by state. Its constitutional and institutional manifestation is the separation of the state and the church. It was George, Jacob Holyoake, in 1850, who coined for the first time the term and explained the meaning of the word 'secular' stating that it has no connection with religion, It is concerned with the wordly things, no relation to the church or religions rule. It was to him a non-religions term.

History reveals that secularism signifies the separation of the state and church. Secularism, necessarily not, has conflict with religion. In recent times a new understanding of secularism has been emerging. Secularism does not mean no faith in religion or philosophy or life. It indicates a spirit of tolerance and understanding of other person's religious faith. This spirit of secularism is an outlook of life. Religion is the faith in spiritual presence, realisation of a higher unseen controlling power, an eternal principle. In fact, religion is a way of life and code of conduct. The origin of religion is in the society of primitive men and in the insecure condition of them. Imaginative interpretation given to natural phenomenon had resulted into religions myth. Religion emphasizes upon the experience of pertual energy, unified force which render strength to human beings.

Religious tolerance is the essence of Indian secularism. All religious isms, whether it is Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, preached tolerance, equality, kindness and brotherhood. Therefore all of them are secular. Secularism is not anti-thesis of religious devoutness. Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi were the devout Hindus, but their entire life and teachings embody the essence of secularism. True religion does not hate other faiths. There is one Creator, we call him by different names in various approaches to religion.

The concept of secularism in India emerged in the context of religion pluralism as against religions authoritarianism in the West. Unlike Europe, secularism in India arose not in the process of conflict between state and church, but as an attempt to unite the followers of different religious faiths. The need of secularism arose in India and secularism was conceived in the two related contexts — first, to encounter the challenge of communalism to national integrity and second to provide a basis for nationalism or nationalist movement. which was shared by all Indians irrespective of their religions. Secularism in India arose in the context of communalism, and not of religion. Secularism in India is not anti-religion stance.

He envisages village as family and treats a judge as its core pillar. Whatever five judges speak with responsibility reveals the sign of village religion and in it idealness of our village prevails. *Gramsabha*, *panchayat* attribute democratic, republic spirit to village administration.

Whatever five judges speak, the sign of village religion
In it idealness of our village in our eyes ||98||

Whatever village one family; the core pillar, a judge
Pressure of justice on all, this pinnacle of progress ||99||

With justice people behave in truth era though no government
Its conversion *panchayat*, democracy, republic ||100||
(Canto XXXIX, 'Earth Paradise')

In his conception, justice, irrespective of caste, race, creed, religion directs society to the pinnacle of success. Village, the unit of society, operates in democratic spirit, delegating power to masses. Mass power is reformative and energy is intrinsic in all people.

Time this of mass power; energy intrinsic all in people
Empire can bow down, the power of mass determination ||14||

When potential energy in masses kinetises it topples down mighty empire too. There is an urgency in today's globalised and interdependent world to understand and define the term multiculturalism as a way of life, a philosophy, a global phenomenon. Multiculturalism is contemporary global reality and it concerns with more than one culture in geographical area called society. Culture deals with language, beliefs, ethos, geographical identities. In multicultural society or pluroethnic society cultural differences prevail due to variables. Though the study of 'multiculturalism' had received impetus in 1990's, multicultural trends were existed in human society before that, and are existing in the present society in various forms. Multiculturalism is multifaceted reality in the era of globalization, rapid, migration. To C.W. Watson, it has implicit meaning of openness to change, receptivity to difference, passion for equality, ability to recognize familiar self in the strangeness of others. U.S.A., Canada, India have multicultural societies but they vary in nature.

History reveals that secularism signifies the separation of the state and church. Secularism is necessarily not in conflict with religion. In recent times a new understanding of secularism has been emerging. It is an approach to the existing multicultural reality. It ensures a peaceful existence of all people, professing diverse religious or faiths.

In Tukadoji's song, which is accepted as the University song of Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, he exhorts :

Let there be brotherhood always in India
Render us blessing
Let all sects, paths be one,
Let no differences be
Let live poor-rich with happiness unanimously
Be then he be Hindu or Christian or Muslim
Let contentment of freedom be pervaded in all
Render us blessing⁵

He expounds that all sets, paths are to be one diminishing differences. There is not be cleavage between poor and rich and let approaches in Hindunism, Christianity, Islam and various religions avail freedom for welfare of human society.

The political reality in Tukadoji's *Gramgeeta* in the Indian perspective reveals that self-governance trusts in *gramsabha*, *grampanchayat* and conceptualises villages state which is self-reliant. Rural self-governance imbies secular spirit and secularism in Indian context arose in context of communalism. Secularism is not anti-religion stance. It is an approach to multicultural reality in society, attributing importance to tolerance and understanding. He visualizes utopian society with self-governance and secular spirit as the cardinal components.

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